

Morpheus's Desert of the Real

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Every bullet has a billet or more: these are called "kills," "hits," and sundry other in our grandiose Roman jargon re-seeded in Americana. With that in mind, the early nineties were dirty years at Berkeley in every respect. In 1991, Searle had his big Berkeley hills house decked with yellow ribbons: Yes, that's correct, we were in Iraq then too, but that time with Prezedent Unelect # 1 Bulsh-sh-shee-can-I-talk-star-wares-tewww or would that be 2 Imprudent? Poppy, we understand you now. Stop masturbating, fuss-head.

Berkeley's good ol' slum-landlord, no we shan't forget him, shan we? Mr. Searle. The Campus Kissinger, self-announced self-declared philistine. You'd think it was a baptismal fiat for him, but wouldn't you then? War Lord of Grammar? Ain't that news. Julian Boyd, this was a good man though, as best they come; and Searle's philosophical confidante, intellectual editor and sixties French Connection to Chomsky. He said to me with a disquieting (to me) actual disgust, a bitterness and turn in the lips not normally seen in that man: "I want to go and pour blood on those yellow ribbons and down the walls of his house." Searle, the Feyerabend-hating war-collusionist and student radical FBI-informant with a succession of governors in his pocket—his early sympathy with the FSM was an arcane relic unrelated to that other activity. Those nights at his Napa Valley estate were surely shock and awe for those oh so brave chicken hawks. Yes, while Searle's just skewed and horse-blinkered dead-ringer Stormin' Norman Schwarzkopf poured gasoline on 10,000 Iraqis up yonder 'long the Tapline Road, 'k'now that? I didn't either. Not at that time anyway, not in the detail. Well, that road extended from US Marine Corps Camp 13 at the Port of Al Jubail up top the map of Saudi Arabia near the Kuwaiti border, that road it ran up into Southern Iraq and funneled into the Karbala Gap at the marshed inland mud of the Euphrates, one of the world's "choke-points" on an oil tapline, Hell on Earth for those afraid of getting torched to death and then photographed for a hungry Roman public, whose media-whore gave it a new name: The Highway of Death. In 1991, while students swore to Descartes, a very un-Roman personage. We didn't have anything if we didn't have our very erudite perspective, did we?

Chomsky declared his terrorist-sweethearts that year, he must have forgotten his encomiums to the pacifist von Humboldt in his slim hardly-arcane little book Cartesian Linguistics. Far from his anti-Vietnam stand with Robert Lowell and

Norman Mailer when they crossed the Potomac into Virginia (Lowell canonized that river twice, once in words, the other with his wobbling but assertive feet) in the year of my birth twenty-five years earlier in order to levitate the Pentagon. My good Berkeley Biblical scholar swore that Chomsky must not set foot on the Berkeley campus that year or ever. Funny little man, tearing across the campus with twenty books under his arms, a raging little prophet flailing his arms a'right tough out of the Apocrypha the way he was taught it was dun good-like. Tragically, he drops his fucking books in the Quad as Chomsky gets booed by Lakoff and eighty per cent of the Berkeley Linguistics department. (Poor Lakoff, he still held the grudge: that the MIT Linguistics department didn't let him in when he wanted to become a Doctor there, Chomsky naturally complicit in the decision.)

This was the atmosphere at Berkeley in the few years prior to my graduation. Perhaps it was only that way for me. Each to his monad. Each and every student nomad. I do remember an event at People's Park. It was a weekend. I found myself wandering around the city. Walked up Haste from Telegraph and sat on a bench just on the edge of People's Park. There were large bright white windowless busses up top of the park occupying that section of shady Bowditch. It was simple: The FEDs were everywhere, hulking it out in the sunshine in the park and returning high on crack into the busses to hump each other. But really, the old black guy on the bench with me, real long shards of grey in his beard; I says to him, "man, dig, what's going on?" The first erudite thing I ever heard said while I was at Berkeley, as I came to understand over the few years that followed. Why? A boy and his dog and his Daddy shot dead in the hills of Idaho, the Janet-Reno-CS-Gas dead zone in Texas. Then, oh then: terror and atrocity and flanked racism in Oklahoma City, the Murrah Building implodes and everyone dies. With Gore Vidal to craft all commentary as post-hoc delirium. So. The good old man answers my question, he says to me: "They're comin' down again." Simple. Clean. Platonic. Erudite. Didn't dip his head back down though. Just looked straight into the distance available to him. He must have been measuring.

I walked down to Telegraph, feeling a little enlightened but then also very alone in the universe, leaving the old man to his devices. (He was in need of none, the FEDs were farting each time they came out of a bus: God and the old man like a couple of Brothers in fact had those flagellants busted that day, and good for them, plaudits and praise galore to them.) I looked at my favorite posters canvassed on the walls and on the sad sycamore trees: They were my salves but also the lonely grists for the mill of my then-Berkeley mind: "Zappa for President." Sure, Zappa'd re-arrange the whole thing, starting, with Zappa-like cunning and clairvoyance (made alloy by his God-given ability for mischief), at the place where it all begins in America: The Treasury. And Jello Biafra, Zappa'd make him his Treasury Secretary, brought on solely to close down its last account, and they'd perform Biafra's "Die for Oil without the Net Sucker." Only they'd be singing the dirge of a whole different class this time, graduating a wholly different Class of '93 into permanent retirement instead of into the teeming life of our colorful world: Bechtel, Halliburton, the Carlyle Group; Schulz, Baker, Cheney, foreclosing on the all-too-likely prophetic return of Scooter Libby and Richard Perle from back out of their Darknesses; and the cross-dressing Dogs

Ash-baby and Rummy-boo taken to Ezra's Pound and given a pair of good owners and a large purple room with gym benches, leathers, and J. Edgar's well-guarded closet of relics ... The Holy Grail. And all the other clownish ghouls. Zapp(a)-ed with music and oracular poetry. But only in Berkeley, folks, only in the mind of a Berkeley graduate. Sad. What a gallivant for the dead and their years. (Not. ... Ha@! That's for you, Cal Slackers; and 4 U 2.)